

Chapter 7: Media That Stirs Emotions



FRIGHT NIGHT!!

- ∨ Lack of research on emotional effects of frightening media
- ∨ Numerous examples to illustrate the impact frightening films have on its viewers
 - Jaws
 - The Exorcist
 - Silence of the Lambs

and believe it or not... The Wizard of Oz!



The Power of Fear

- ∨ Herbert Blumer (1933)
 - 93% of children studied reported experiencing fright from watching a movie

More recently,

- ∨ Joanne Cantor (1994)
 - 75% of elementary school children reported fright from a movie or TV program
- ∨ Edward Palmer (1983)
 - one-third of children interviewed said they regretted watching certain scenes
- ∨ Parents have voiced concerns over children's nightmares and fright reactions

What About Choo?

Can you recall any movie that left you sleepless, having nightmares and afraid to be alone for days or even weeks?

Developmental Theory

Joanne Cantor

- ∨ Jean Piaget's theory helped sort out her reports of fright that she recorded from children and her parents.



Jean Piaget's Theory

- Children pass through a series of stages in their cognitive development.
- The way they process, interpret and think about the world around them depends on where they are in this sequence of stages.



Sequence of Stages

- Concrete, visual appearance
 - Ages 2-7
 - E.g: The wicked queen of Snow White
 - Characters that looked grotesque and menacing scared them.



Sequence of Stages

- Conceptual or abstract thought
 - Older than 7 years old
 - A shift from (1) to (2)
 - Children at this age related to shows that featured events and characters that could actually occur in the real world.
 - E.g: Violence or bodily harm to a character, natural disaster and technological disaster.
 - The only problem: they do not understand the low probability of many of the "real" events that they see in the media.

Comparison of the Sequence of Stages

- Children of ages 2 – 7 find the wicked Queen more disturbing than the kidnapping scenes that children of ages 7 and above find disturbing.
- Only because to begin with, children of ages 2 - 7 find it harder to understand the kidnapping scenes.



The Incredible Hulk experiment

- An experiment conducted by the author, Glenn Sparks.
- Findings were very important in supporting Joanne Cantor's reasoning.
- Experiment involved showing a clip from the *Incredible Hulk* television series.
- Experiment was carried out with the approval of parents, children and a professional committee.

The Incredible Hulk experiment

- Scene depicted David Banner trying to save someone caught in a burning room. However, as he was saving the person, he got hurled to a ceiling due to an explosion, which enraged him.
- As a result, he began his strange transformation into the Hulk.
- Once fully evolved, he proceeded to save the worker by gently lifting him to safety. The scene ended with the Hulk growling ferociously.



The Incredible Hulk experiment

- With respect to Cantor's logic, results should show that older children will feel more fear than younger children in the first part of the scene.
- The prospect of explosions and a fire should frighten them as these are events that can actually happen in reality.
- This is due to them being able to distinguish between fantasy and reality, thus understanding the dangers in the scene.

The Incredible Hulk experiment

- Furthermore, the patterns of fright reactions should change once the transformation begins.
- The older children should then realize that the Hulk is a good character and will save the day.
- This is due to them discounting the ugly looks and focus on the Hulk's role.



The Incredible Hulk experiment

- In addition, young children should view the scene very differently.
- When the Hulk appears, they should not think much except for the fact that the Hulk looked scary.
- The younger children should show more fright at this point until the end of the scene.



The Incredible Hulk experiment

- To gather data on reactions, the children's heart rate and other physiological reactions were measure.
- The results gathered were exactly the same as what was predicted; Cantor's logic was proven.

The Incredible Hulk experiment

- The older children showed more fright during the explosion and fire, and calmed down when the Hulk appeared.
- The younger children were calmer during the first part of the scene, but got more upset when the Hulk appeared.



The Incredible Hulk experiment

- √ Video:
 - ⊗ Cantor's logic can be applied likewise.
 - ⊗ Children above 7 years old would feel tense when the two men were attempting to abduct the lady.
 - ⊗ Children below 7 would feel tense the moment the Hulk appears.

The Incredible Hulk experiment

- √ Conclusions from the experiment:
 - Joanne Cantor's ideas about the kinds of media that frighten children of different ages are confirmed.
 - For children under 7, the physical appearance is the determinant.
 - For children above 7, if the event can happen in reality and the consequences are physically threatening.



Why is the Paranormal So Scary Mary?



Fantasy or Reality

- √ Why do adults get scared even though they are able to make a distinction between fantasy and reality?
- √ The most frightening movies skillfully blur the lines between fantasy and reality
- √ Put in an everyday setting, viewers are made to believe that what they see could actually happen in reality



Apprehension of the Unknown

- √ People fear what they know nothing about
- √ We don't know much about the paranormal apart from hearsay and stories being passed around
- √ Even scientists can't conclusively prove or disprove the existence of the paranormal



Cont...

- √ The effectiveness of paranormal films lie in the fact that there is a possibility, however slight, of it occurring in real life
- √ If it does, we would be helpless as there is nothing we can do since we know so little about it
- √ The feeling of vulnerability makes us even more apprehensive to paranormal occurrences

The Exorcist (1973)

- ∨ Horror film masterpiece
- ∨ Sensational, nauseating special effects (360 degree head rotation)



The Exorcist (1973)

- ∨ Based on a nearly 2 month long exorcism performed in 1949 on a 14 year old boy
- ∨ About devil possession and the exorcism of demonic spirits from a young innocent girl



Poltergeist (1982)

- ∨ How the peaceful lives of a family of five was disrupted by a phantasmal force
- ∨ Youngest daughter has a "special" relationship with the house



Poltergeist (1982)

- ∨ She talks to the TV set and gets responses back
- ∨ She was taken away through the TV set
- ∨ Race against time to fight the hostile entities

Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)

- ∨ Fred Krueger (child molester)
- ∨ "Gift" was being able to pass like a ghost between the real and dream worlds



Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)

- ∨ Has a "Boogeyman" effect
- ∨ Kills kids in their sleep



The Maid (2005)

- ✓ Chinese Seventh Month
- ✓ The maid unknowingly breaks the “rules” of the Hungry Ghost period



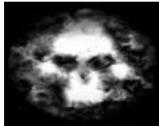
The Maid (2005)

- ✓ Starts seeing strange apparitions at night
- ✓ Nightmare begins
- ✓ Someone is trying to reach out to her



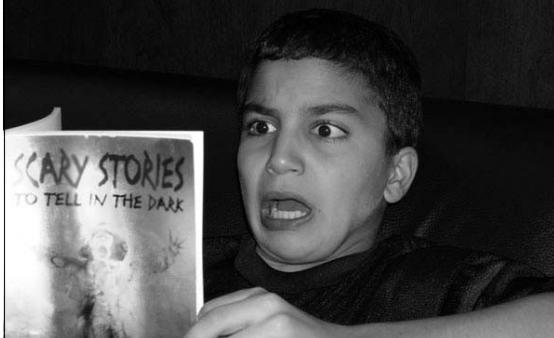
Why Does Asian Horror have more Appeal to Asians?

- ✓ Audiences can relate better
- ✓ More culturally relevant
- ✓ Based on tradition, folklore & superstition
- ✓ Usually has an underlying issue of morality
E.g repentance, vengeance, retribution



Why do we find horror movies intriguing?

Is It Fun To Be Scared?



What Do People Fear?

- ✓ Research conducted by Lane and Gallone (1999)
- ✓ Uses the Fear Survey Schedule for Children and (FSSC) and self-generated answers
- ✓ A sample of 266 15 – 18 year olds

What Do People Fear Con't

FSSC	Self-Generated
1. Someone in my family dying	1. Spiders
2. Someone in my family having an accident	2. Death
3. Not being able to breath	3. Death of a family member
4. AIDs	4. Losing friends
5. Falling from high places	5. Heights
6. Murderers	6. Being a failure
7. Getting a serious illness	7. Being alone
8. Someone in my family getting sick	8. Ghosts
9. Losing friends	9. Failing at school
10. Having no friends	10. Snakes
10. Having an operation	

Fear as Entertainment

- 1/3 do not enjoy it and will avoid it at all costs
- 1/3 enjoy it and actively seek it out
- 1/3 claim it depends on the context

(Sparks, pg.139)



Why Might We Enjoy Fear?

Two theoretical explanations:

- Theory of Excitation Transfer
- Gender Role Socialization

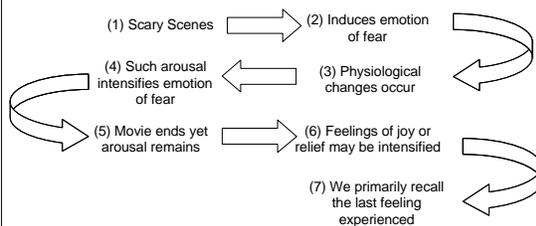
Theory of Excitation Transfer

- First used by Dolf Zillmann during the 1980's
- Explains how "arousal from any source can intensify an emotional experience and make it much more prominent than it would be ordinarily without arousal"

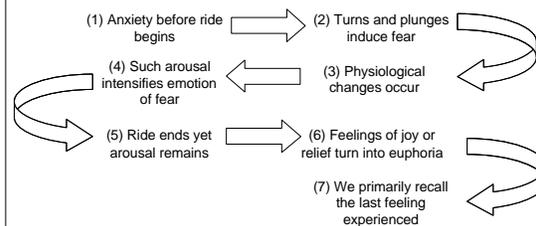
(Sparks, pg. 118)



Excitation Transfer During Scary Movies



Excitation Transfer During a Roller-coaster Ride



Do All Share the Same Experience?

- √ We must consider the 'weight' of emotions
 - Did terror outweigh relief?
 - Did relief outweigh terror?
- √ This could explain the enjoyment of fear inducing activities
 - People also tend to enjoy reporting their enjoyment

Gender Role Socialization

- √ This theory suggests that frightening movies perpetuate traditional gender roles
 - i. Male as the protector
 - ii. Female as the protected

Male

- √ Ancient tribal initiation rites or rites of passage test masculinity
 - Tests their effectiveness as a protector



Female

- √ They may reward or sanction the reactions of males during these initiation rites
 - Display signs of discomfort, need for protection or approval
 - Withhold affection for failure



Testing Gender Role Socialization

- √ Tested by Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf and Aust during the mid 1980's
- √ They exposed 36 male and 36 female undergraduates to a horror movie
 - Measuring items like companion's physical appeal, personality traits, and desirability



Results of Testing Gender Role Socialization

- √ Men enjoyed the movie most in the company of distressed women
- √ Women enjoyed the movie most in the company of mastering men
- √ Mastery enhanced physical appeal of less attractive men
- √ Display of distress generally enhanced physical appeal of women
- √ Display of distress generally reduced desirability as a working mate
- √ Mastery of fear was generally associated with positive personality traits

Theory About Emotional Coping: What's A Parent To Do?



Theory About Emotional Coping: What's A Parent To Do?

- ∨ To deal with children's fright reactions to shows, parents tell them what they see is "not real" or "just pretend".
- ∨ Advantage: More effective with older children who are able to differentiate between reality and fantasy.
- ∨ Disadvantage: Strategy does not work as well with younger children
- ∨ Believe that by labeling something 'not real' should it make it less threatening for kids.

- ∨ Kids under the age of 7 are gullible, thus acquiring some superficial knowledge about the difference between reality and fantasy.
- ∨ Knowledge alone is not sufficient to make a difference in processing media images
- ∨ Example: To show a young child's difficulty with the concept of reality, the author stated how his child actually believed that a large statue of Rudolph was capable of eating
- ∨ Evidence shows that violence viewing also induces intense fears and anxieties in child viewers

- ∨ Ways to prevent or reduce the harm projected by media violence:

For older children,

1. Benefitted when one spoke about how media productions contained staged scenes

2. Work through the minimal chances of such events happening in a child's life-- Cognitive strategies

- ∨ **Cognitive strategies:** encourages children to think about the things they already know and relate those things to aspects of the movie that are scary
- ∨ Fears diminished over time

For younger children,

1. To cope with media-induced fears is to prevent them in the first place

- ∨ Some shows are classified as children's shows yet they contain characters with scary appearances
- ∨ Parents should avoid any kind of entertainment for their kids depending on how characters look



- ∨ Slightest variations in appearance is enough to trigger fear

- ∨ Vital for parents to know their own children-- some kids are more sensitive to visual features compared to others

- ∨ Solution: Spend time with a child during viewing so as to be more aware of their emotional reactions

- ∨ Parents should not contemplate to switch off the TV at the first sign of their child displaying fear

- ∨ Convinced that children need to continue to watch the program in order to "conquer" their fear



Advisable to avoid extensive discussions with the young about frightening shows.

- “Out of sight, out of mind” – works for young children



- Difficulty in predicting children's fright reactions to television and films-- a child's level of cognitive development influences how he/she perceives and responds to media stimuli
- As children mature, they become frightened by media depictions involving increasingly abstracted concepts

Desensitization and Hostility

- Desensitization:** a psychological process by which an emotional response is repeatedly evoked in situations in which the action tendency that arises out of the emotion proves to be irrelevant
- Used to treat phobias
- Advantage: Advisable for older children as it makes them feel that any given event is actually common

Beyond Fear: Other Emotional Reactions to Media

Different ways our feelings are inextricably tied to the media



Empathy: I Feel What You Feel

- Empathy:** the tendency for viewers to feel the same feelings as the person they are watching on TV.
- Viewers can experience *virtually* any emotion as a result of consuming media depictions of other people.
- Empathy is especially likely to occur after forming a *positive view or bond* with the person projected on TV.
- For instance, the U.S. television coverage of the Olympic games
- Also, Mel Gibson's 2002 film, *We Were Soldiers*



Study: Empathic Responses to Media

- By:** Dolf Zillmann & Joanne Cantor
- To Test:** If empathic process took place even in children
- Sample:** Third-grade boys and girls
- Process:** Creating 2 conditions using different films. 1st condition shown a nice child and 2nd condition shown a mean child. Children liked the nice child.
- Happy ending** – Nice child got a new bicycle and were shown in a state of glee.
- Sad ending** – Nice child got onto an old bicycle and had an accident.



- Result:** Children felt gleeful on happy ending and sad on sad ending. Children empathized with the nice child and took on his feelings.
- Total opposite for the mean child. The children's emotional reactions might be described as *anti-empathic*.
- This study suggests that feelings of empathy apply across a *wide range* of emotions and are seen even in very young viewers.

Media to Manage Mood

According to Dolf Zillmann's *theory of mood management*,

- Our entertainment choices are often a function of how we feel,
- And how we anticipate the exposure to certain media content is likely to make us feel during that exposure.
- When people find their emotions at a low point, they make entertainment choices to lift their spirits.



Study: Female viewers and TV Viewing Preferences

- By:** Jean Meadowcraft & Zolf Zillmann
- Data Gathered:** TV programs preferences and where exactly the women were in their monthly menstrual cycle.
- Premenstrual* – levels of progesterone and estrogen drop, leading to bad mood and even depression.
- Middle of their cycles* – levels of progesterone and estrogen high, typically accompanied by more positive mood states.

Results

Women at their Premenstrual Point
Prefer Situational Comedies



Women at Middle of their Cycles
Prefer Dramas



Does Mediated Emotion Disrupt & Confuse Our Emotional Well-Being?

- Some lines of analysis suggest that the most profound effects of electronic media on human emotion may be *more disturbing than helpful*.
- For example, just 24 hours after the 9/11 tragedy, some commentators were already referring to people who had "*started the recovery process*".



- Dr. Sally Miller: "People who lose loved ones don't *really* ever 'recover' from their loss and during the first 24 hours, people are still in the state of shock."

Zillmann's essay (1991) seems to suggest that:

- New technology may disrupt and confuse the human tendency to experience emotions more slowly in a process that gradually unfolds over a longer period of time.
- A viewer may find that a more minor emotional reaction is intensified by arousal left over from a preceding emotional reaction just minutes ago.
- Result:** We run through different affective states of highly *artificial* speeds and often get *confused* about which emotions we initially reacted to with greatest intensity.
- Moreover, this mediated world of emotions may be *increasingly* the one we are turning to as a source for learning *how we ought to respond emotionally* to the events all around us.

Any Questions?

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